

Testimony of Jeanne Milstein, Child Advocate
In Support of Senate Bill No. 156, AN ACT CONCERNING SIBLING VISITATION
FOR CHILDREN IN THE CARE AND CUSTODY OF
THE COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES,
and Senate Bill No. 193, AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATED REPORTERS
AND REQUIRING CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS CHECKS
FOR YOUTH CAMP EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS.
February 28, 2012

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Jeanne Milstein and I am the Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in **Senate Bill No. 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families**. I strongly and enthusiastically support this bill, and ask that you recall the legislative forum in fall of 2011, at which youth very poignantly described the importance of frequent and meaningful sibling contact while in state care. I applaud the Department of Children and Families' ongoing efforts to meet Outcome Measure Number 10 of the *Juan F.* settlement agreement by placing siblings together whenever possible; enacting S.B. 156 would strengthen the effort to maintain natural supports and integral relationships with siblings for children who are not placed together. Emerging research suggests that sibling attachments help to buffer children from adverse experiences such as neglect, parental substance abuse, or indeed removal from home, and that children have opportunities for frequent, meaningful contact with siblings while they are in foster care experience less frequent placement disruptions and better permanency outcomes.¹ S.B. 156 provides for exceptions to minimum weekly visits for siblings who are placed separately when such frequent visits are determined to be contrary to the best interest of any child involved and encourages DCF, at minimum, to place siblings in close proximity to one another in order to facilitate regular contact; therefore, I urge you to support this bill as written.

I also offer my strong support for **Senate Bill No. 193, An Act Concerning Mandated Reporters and Requiring Criminal History Records Checks for Youth Camp Employees and Volunteers**, as its addition of coaches, athletic directors, and staff in public or private athletic organizations to the list of mandated reporters addresses a significant gap in the existing statute. As recommended in OCA's 2010 investigative report, "Protecting Our Children: Improving protections for children when allegations are made that school system personnel abused and/or neglected children," new and existing mandated reporters should not only have

¹ <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf>

mandated reporter training available to them, as required in current statutes, but should receive mandatory in-service trainings on the responsibilities of mandated reporters.² It is imperative that those who are mandated to make reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and face penalties for failing to do so be provided with the information and training necessary to fulfill this vital responsibility.

I urge the Committee to vote favorably on both S.B. 156 and S.B. 193. And in closing my final piece of legislative testimony before retiring from my position as Child Advocate, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the members of the Select Committee on Children for your dedication to the children of Connecticut. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve these children and work along with all of you to ensure their protection and wellbeing. Thank you for your continuing commitment to improving the lives of our children.

² http://www.ct.gov/oca/lib/oca/DCF-Education_Report_Final_7-8-10.pdf